

Regional Context

Section 8-3b of the Connecticut General Statutes requires municipalities to inform the regional planning agency and neighboring municipalities of any zoning changes or regulations that may take place within five hundred feet of the boundary of another municipality within the area of operation of a regional planning agency. The purpose of this is to ensure that compatible land uses will exist along town boundaries. It is also used to ensure that local plans are consistent with regional and state plans of conservation and development.

This chapter outlines the major findings or provisions of the plans of conservation and development of neighboring municipalities to help the Town of Enfield understand what common goals and objectives they may have with them. This will help the communities work together.

The Town of Somers, CT

The Town of Somers, Connecticut is located at the eastern border of Enfield. Somers has just over 10,000 people, living within what is a largely residential and agricultural community. Unlike Enfield, Somers serves much more as a bedroom community, without a dominating presence of major corporations, employers or retail centers.

Plan of Conservation & Development

In 2004, the Town drafted its POCD to define its vision for the future of the community. The plan defines its guiding philosophy as to “Balance conservation and development to protect and enhance community character and improve Somers’ quality of life.” With these principles set forth, the plan does not aim to achieve a tremendous level of growth in population or economics, but rather it promotes strategies to conserve and maintain the rural, small town qualities that already exist, and which in some cases are threatened.

The Somers POCD does not emphasize the regional contexts of its settings, nor does it strive to produce significant region-wide impacts. The plan is organized into three primary themes: protecting important

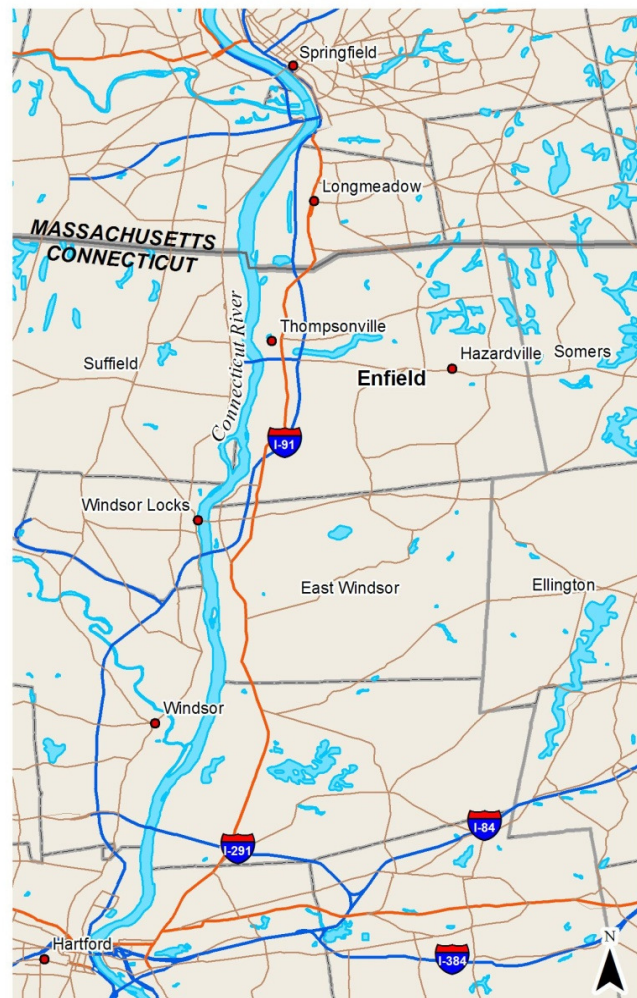


Figure 9 Enfield and Surrounding Towns

resources, guiding appropriate development and addressing community needs. Each theme identifies major components to be addressed.

Environmental Protection

The plan places an emphasis on the protection of the community's natural and open space resources. It encourages the development of programs to preserve and promote the existing agriculture industry and its valuable landscapes. The plan is cautious of the pressures that the Town faces, or will face, for new residential, commercial and industrial development. It is sensitive to the concept that new development has the potential to significantly alter the landscape and character of the town and provide threats to the natural environment. Among the strategies to preserve the landscape is to develop a system of greenways that interconnect open space areas and allow for public accessibility and recreation. The plan supports the protection of water resources through stormwater management, riparian plantings and regulations regarding development around aquifers.

Development Strategies

The development strategies of Somers are focused upon improving the patterns and quality of development in ways that enhance the existing development. The plan does not target significant growth in development as a goal. Instead, it suggests that new commercial and retail development should meet the everyday needs of residents. Guidelines should be established to regulate the aesthetics of commercial and industrial development and incentives should be created to enhance the appearance of existing businesses. The plan also encourages the prohibition of retail, restaurant and personal service uses outside of village areas as a means of curtailing sprawl and strengthening small urban cores. A major focus is placed upon providing alternative housing for elderly residents as the local population continues to increase in age.

Infrastructure & Transportation Services

The plan also recommends strategies to ensure that the town continues to adequately serve local needs in regards to transportation, infrastructure and municipal service delivery. It recommends enhancements to the multi-modal transportation infrastructure, not only recommending improved automobile accommodations, but also expanding the sidewalk and multi-use trail network connecting villages and major activity nodes. Again, new and expanding growth is not the focus, instead goals tailored to enhancing quality services and infrastructure for the present community.

Somers is a Connecticut Town that has experienced some limited growth and projections anticipate continued growth. However, the Town has clearly set its vision on maintaining its high rural character, preserving its agricultural industries and enhancing the quality of life for existing residents. Impacts upon surrounding municipalities such as Enfield will be minimal, with Somers continuing to serve as a bedroom community, offering residential opportunities for those seeking a rural, agrarian place to live.

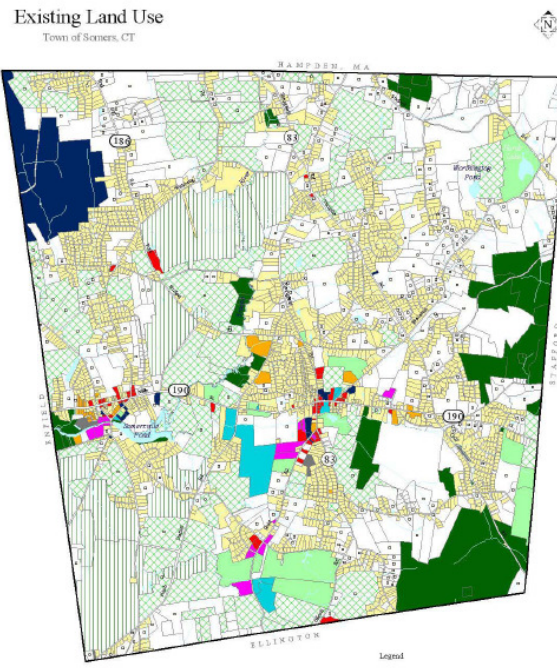


Figure 10 Town of Somers Current Land Use Map

The Town of East Windsor, CT

Characteristics & Trends

According to the population projections presented in the East Windsor POCD, the East Windsor's population is expected to reach 10,440 to 10,870 by the year 2010. By 2020, the population is expected to increase by 3.4% to a total between 10,800 and 11,720.

During the past decade (1990-1999), construction in the Town of East Windsor has averaged 22 units of single family homes per year, 8.3 units of multi-family homes per year, 3.9 units of mobile homes per year, and 5.7 units of commercial and industrial facilities per year. There were no projections of future construction trends.

The local economies of East Windsor and Enfield are closely related. East Windsor's primary economic development area is Route 5, which extends into Enfield's southern warehouse and office park area. In addition, Enfield has a role as an employment center for East Windsor residents. In 2000, approximately 14% of East Windsor's labor force commuted to Enfield.

The Town of East Windsor offers residents several public parks, which are used mainly for baseball and soccer. Indoor recreation is offered at school facilities, which implies limited availability. There are no community centers in town, and all activities offered by the Town occur in Town Hall, the Town Hall Annex in Warehouse Point, or the senior center in Broad Brook. There is also a town library.

Plan of Conservation & Development

The Town of East Windsor completed its most recent Plan of Conservation and Development in 2004. East Windsor's Plan of Conservation and Development had three core strategies: (1) preserve community resources, including open space and the quality of the environment; (2) guide the development of

residential and commercial uses; (3) meet the needs of the community with adequate public services, including infrastructure.

Open Space Preservation

At the time the East Windsor POCD was completed, approximately 80% of the total land area of the Town of East Windsor was undeveloped, but zoned for residential use. Although not formally designated, many of these undeveloped lands are perceived and valued as open space. East Windsor residents expressed concern that residential growth might negatively impact the character of their community. In fact, open space conservation had overwhelming support from participants in the town's planning process: 87% agreed that the Town should be actively involved in open space preservation. Approximately, 294 acres of land are owned by the Town of East Windsor for open space, while an additional 675 acres are owned by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.

To further the community's environmental goals, East Windsor's objectives included preserving open space as continuous swaths of protected undeveloped land that are linked to parks through wildlife corridors and pedestrian trails. In addition to this, two recommendations stood out: (1) changing the Town's subdivision requirements to set aside a portion of the land for open space from 10% to 20%; and (2) pursuing inclusion in the Connecticut River and Scantic River greenway designation. The Plan mentioned that the Town could take advantage of its status as a "distressed municipality" under the Department of Economic and Community Development. This designation made the Town eligible for a 65% funding match for open space conservation and 50% funding match for resource enhancement or protection.

Farmland Preservation

Preservation of agricultural land also ranked high in residents' priorities: over 86% of the residents that participated in the planning process said the Town of East Windsor should take measures to protect agriculture. They determined that agricultural lands, and historic places and scenic roads in rural areas contribute to the character of their community. Three notable recommendations included using the State's purchase of development rights program, designating a sewer avoidance area east of the Scantic River, and adopting a right to farm policy in accordance with the Connecticut General Statutes Section 19a-341, which sets criteria to evaluate agricultural leases on Town land.

Wetlands and Water Quality

Like Enfield, the Town of East Windsor is abundant in wetlands. The East Windsor POCD identified the presence of two rare black spruce bogs, which have very unique species of plants and insects found in very few places elsewhere in the state. Unfortunately, water quality has not always been the best. The Plan mentioned that there several areas where pesticide use to control damage to tobacco crops has caused water quality issues in the past.

At the time the East Windsor POCD was completed, the Town had floodplain regulations in place. Recommendations to continue improving water quality included developing aquifer protection regulations with assistance from the CT DEP, and new impervious surface standards to control stormwater pollution.

Historic Preservation

East Windsor residents also consider historic preservation a significant planning issue in their community. According to the POCD, approximately 65% of residents said the Town could do a better job of protecting its historic resources. A total of five buildings in East Windsor are listed in the State and National Register of Historic Places. Many of these resources are located close to the Scantic River, in an area known as Melrose, and near the Connecticut River on Warehouse Point.

Future Land Use

Enfield and East Windsor share one boundary and land uses on either side do not appear to be in conflict. There is, however, a small village on the waterfront known as Warehouse Point. This area has historic resources and residential uses, which may have to be considered when determining the types of activities allowed in the industrial area. As shown on Figure 11 in pink, business, industry and warehousing in East Windsor are conglomerated close to the Connecticut River and along Route 5. The town has another residential and commercial center to the east of the Scantic River near Broad Brook. There are several large parcels of protected open space along the Scantic River, but most of the land is identified for residential use.

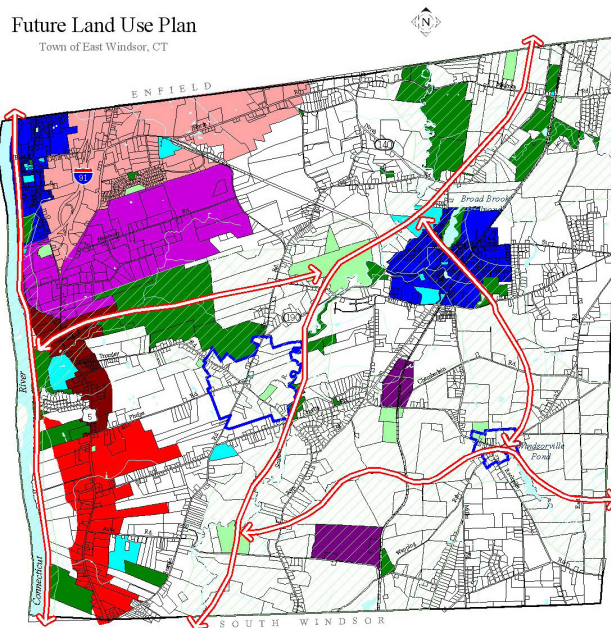


Figure 11 East Windsor's Future Land Use Plan

The Town of Suffield, CT

Suffield residents have been very concerned about the changing character of their community at least since the 1980s. According to the 1999 POCD, Suffield's 1987 POCD declared that it was the last opportunity for Suffield residents to determine the future of agriculture, open space, residential and industrial development, and transportation in their community. The Town of Suffield has gone through many changes since the 1990s, most notably urbanization near the southern town line. A predominantly agricultural community within the Hartford area, the Town of Suffield feels that its ability to control its own growth and rural character has been severely limited by the expansion of Bradley International Airport and the subsequent growth in Windsor Locks.

Transportation & Land Use

The impact of aircraft noise from Bradley International Airport led to a recommendation to rezone residential areas affected by the airport. Traffic problems have also been created by the airport's growing activity levels. As a result, the Plan supported construction of a bypass to and from the airport to help

alleviate growing traffic problems. The State of Connecticut also made plans to expand Route 75 up to the border with Massachusetts to alleviate traffic problems in this area.

While air transportation is very convenient, one of the main disadvantages of living in Suffield is that there is no mass transit. Bus and train services are not available in Suffield, and the closest public transportation locations are in Enfield and Windsor Locks.

Open Space Conservation

The Town of Suffield has the second largest land area of all towns in the Capitol Region. In 1999, approximately 66% of its land was undeveloped. The area with the most intense development is the eastern half of the town, which is closer to the Connecticut River waterfront and is away from hilly and very wet lands that are best suited for agriculture and open space.

The Plan recommended conserving 55% of the land currently zoned for residential use as open space. Protection measures include acquiring land for recreation, watershed protection, wildlife, agriculture, forest and other compatible uses. In addition, the Plan talked about taking advantage of the land trusts, conservation easements, and state purchase of development rights programs for farmland preservation.

Wetlands & Water Quality

Wet soils are a widespread constraint for development in Suffield, just as it is in Enfield. However, because the Town's goal is to preserve agriculture, higher density residential uses, and commercial and industrial uses have been directed to other parts of town. Flooding is another common issue in Suffield. The Town has developed a sewer avoidance plan to limit how much to extend public sewer infrastructure. This has also helped Town officials and residents understand that sewer infrastructure is not the only effective alternative for water problems.

Development & Construction Activity

In 2005, Suffield's population was 11,750. During the past decade (1990-1999), the Town of Suffield has had an average of 34 housing units per year. According to the Plan, the Town's goal is to continue to offer housing in a rural setting, and to offer more diverse housing opportunities such as senior and multi-family housing. In terms of affordable housing, 15% of existing housing was affordable. The Plan recommended revising this allocation, but did not suggest a standard.

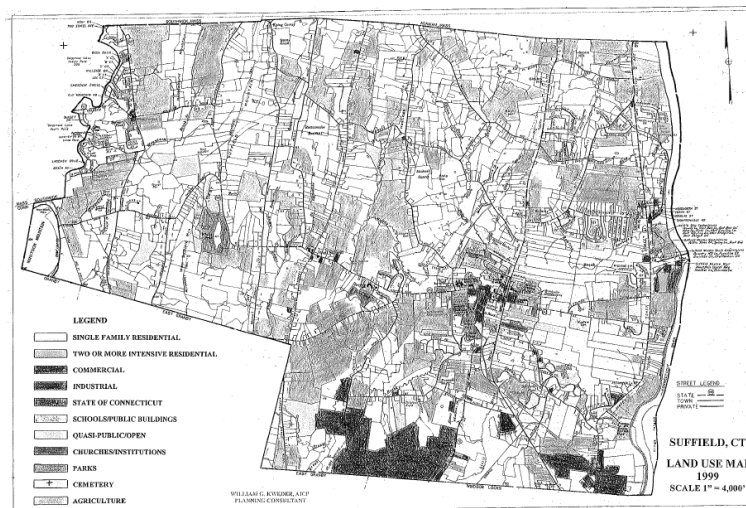


Figure 12 Town of Suffield Land Use Map

The Town of Longmeadow, MA

Longmeadow Long Range Plan

According to the Longmeadow Long Range Plan, the Town had about 15,633 residents in the year 2000. The growth rate over the past decade (1990-1999) was 5.5% per year, but population projections indicated that by the year 2020, the population will actually decline by 13.4%. Current population composition is dominated by individuals over 55 years of age. The report explains that one factor of expected population decline is that the amount of elderly persons living below the poverty level is a growing concern, as well as the fact that there is few rental housing for younger households. As people age and look for smaller housing that is also more accessible to services, and as younger households are forced to move elsewhere to find housing they can afford, the population can reasonably be expected to continue to decline.

Housing Development

The Longmeadow Long Range Plan indicates that about 23% of the town is in agricultural use. Most of the town (74%) is in residential use. Housing in Longmeadow is relatively affordable to a majority of residents and covers a broad range of values. Unfortunately, less than 3% of all housing is considered affordable housing. This low proportion of affordable housing is considerably less than the state's goal of 10% affordable housing.

New housing construction in the Town of Longmeadow is becoming increasingly more difficult because most of the town is already built out. However, new housing construction has been dominated by construction of rental housing. In 2000, over 36% of the increase in the town's housing stock consisted of rental housing. Very low vacancy rates were deemed to be a good sign (less than 2% vacancy rate), but there appears to be a lot of turnover, which is not a good sign of residential stability. According to the Plan, more than 75% of renters and 30% of homeowners lived in their house 5 years or less in 2000. Another disadvantage of Longmeadow's rental housing stock is that most rental housing is single family homes; there is very limited supply of typical 2-bedroom apartments.

The Town's strategy to enable more housing development is to allow multi-family housing to expand where feasible, building of accessory apartments, and infill development in character with the area.

Commercial Development

The Town of Longmeadow has a limited non-residential tax base that consists mainly of health care, retail and other professional services. According to the Plan, the town has the potential to develop between 100,000 to 150,000 square feet of retail or office. There is also the potential to accommodate a 130,500 square feet suburban business park for office, manufacturing or flex space. This type of development could be possible through the sale of town-owned land.

In addition to that, the Plan suggested turning Longmeadow Street / Route 5 into a commercial corridor. If pursued, this would entail conversion of residential buildings to commercial ones. While feasible, the Plan did mention that this alternative was unpopular.

Recreation & Open Space

While 90% of the town is built out, the Town of Longmeadow is committed to expanding protected open space areas for recreational and wildlife conservation purposes. The Town has Wolf Swamp Fields and the Fannie Stebbins Memorial Wildlife Refuge (338 acres), which is listed as a National Landmark. Both are close to the boundary with Enfield. A riverfront park will be created after the Town acquires property along 200/216 Anthony Rd. This property will help the Town meet its goals for conservation and passive recreation. It will also help secure public access to the Connecticut River. However, there will only be access for non-motorized watercraft to protect environmentally sensitive areas. The Town is also planning to complete a bike path system that would connect it to the Springfield, Massachusetts bikeway.

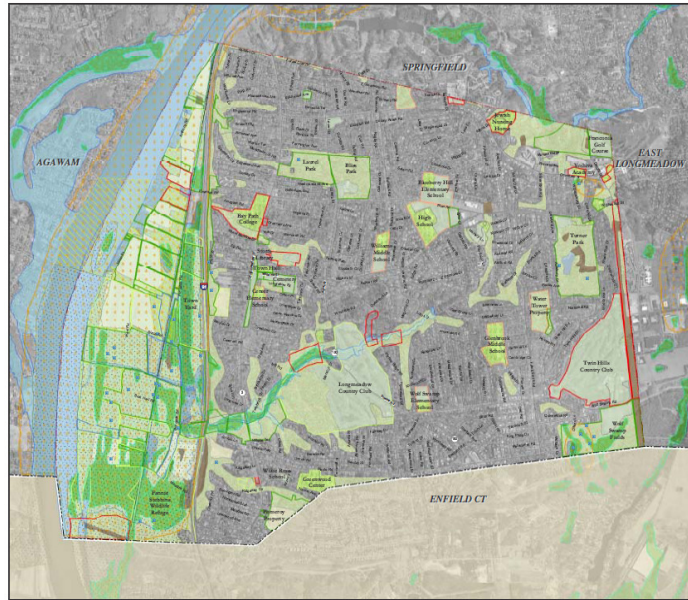


Figure 13 Town of Longmeadow, MA Land Use Suitability Map

Communication & Transparency

One of the issues identified in the town planning process was poor communication between town residents and town government. This problem was found to result in considerable misunderstanding about town government functions and use of public funds. Many residents had the perception that the local government was inefficient and wasteful. Giving a more transparent appearance about government functions was resolved to be achieved by making public information more easily accessible to town residents through various media. In addition, the plan proposed that the town should establish collaborative relationships with local community organizations to provide additional communication channels and find more ways for local government and residents to align their goals.

Connecticut Plan of Conservation & Development

The State of Connecticut provides a framework for land use planning in Connecticut. This framework ensures that varying levels of regional and municipal jurisdictions have consistent land use and development goals, and that the patterns reinforce the strengths of each region for the benefit of the entire state.

The State's Land Use Policies are divided into two major types: those that promote development and those that promote conservation. Each type of policy provides general land use categories to guide activities in those areas. Together, the categories reflect a hierarchy of land uses. These are summarized below.

Development Area Policies

Regional Centers – Regional Centers are the state’s traditional centers of commerce and industry. Redevelopment and revitalization activities should be conducted as necessary to help them adapt to new conditions and maintain their regional significance.

Neighborhood Conservation Areas – Many urban areas with a wide variety of land uses and development densities are included in this category. The policy’s focus is on maintaining each area’s overall character. Infill development and maximum use of existing infrastructure are encouraged for that purpose.

Growth Areas – Growth Areas are places in which less than 80% of the surface area is built-up and there is the potential for urban expansion, including the expansion of existing or planned infrastructure to serve the region.

Rural Community Centers – Rural community centers are places with a village center setting. There should be an assortment of land uses, and the dominant development style should be mixed use.

Conservation Area Policies

Existing Preserved Open Space – This policy refers to all permanently protected open space in public and quasi public ownership.

Preservation Areas – Preservation areas are places where state policy is to avoid new infrastructure construction to accommodate new development (although in some cases, the classification includes lands owned by utilities). Land identified as preservation areas include floodplains and drinking water supplies.

Conservation Areas – Conservation Areas are places with features that are subject to long-term resource management. They include Aquifer Protection Areas and local or National Register of Historic Places districts. Certain regulations may put restriction on land use in these areas.

Rural Lands – Rural lands are places where the state does not support large-scale infrastructure development. The development that occurs here should not exceed the carrying capacity of the site, particularly with regards to water and sewage.

The State of Connecticut is mandated by state legislature to update its POCD on a 5-year cycle. The upcoming update of the State POCD will begin on Sept. 1, 2009, and it is expected to be adopted by January 2012.

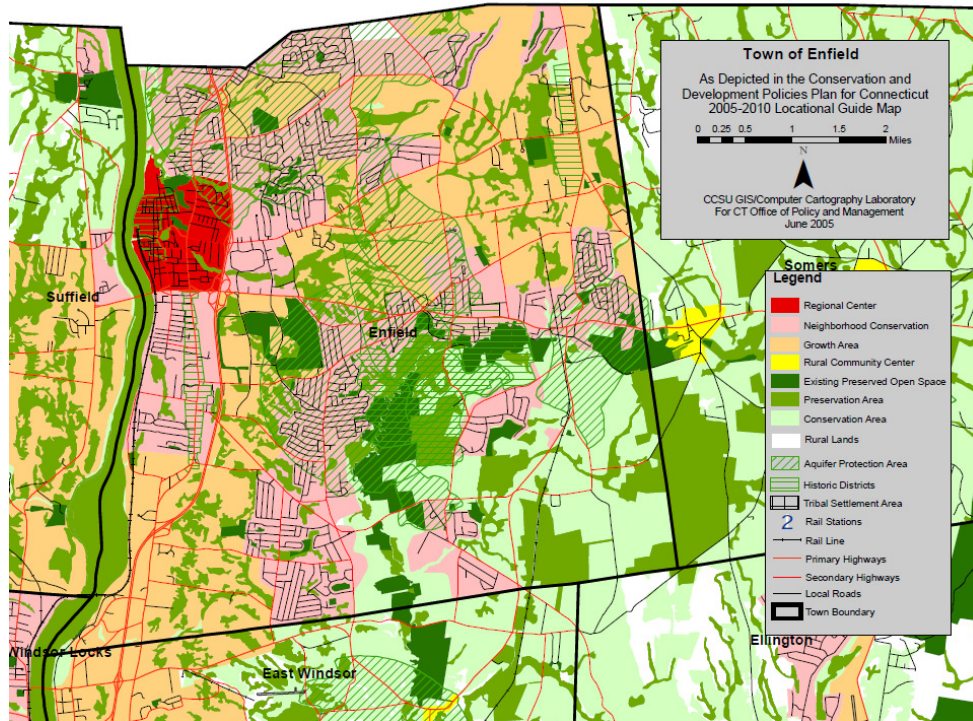


Figure 14 Enfield's ideal land use according to the State POCD

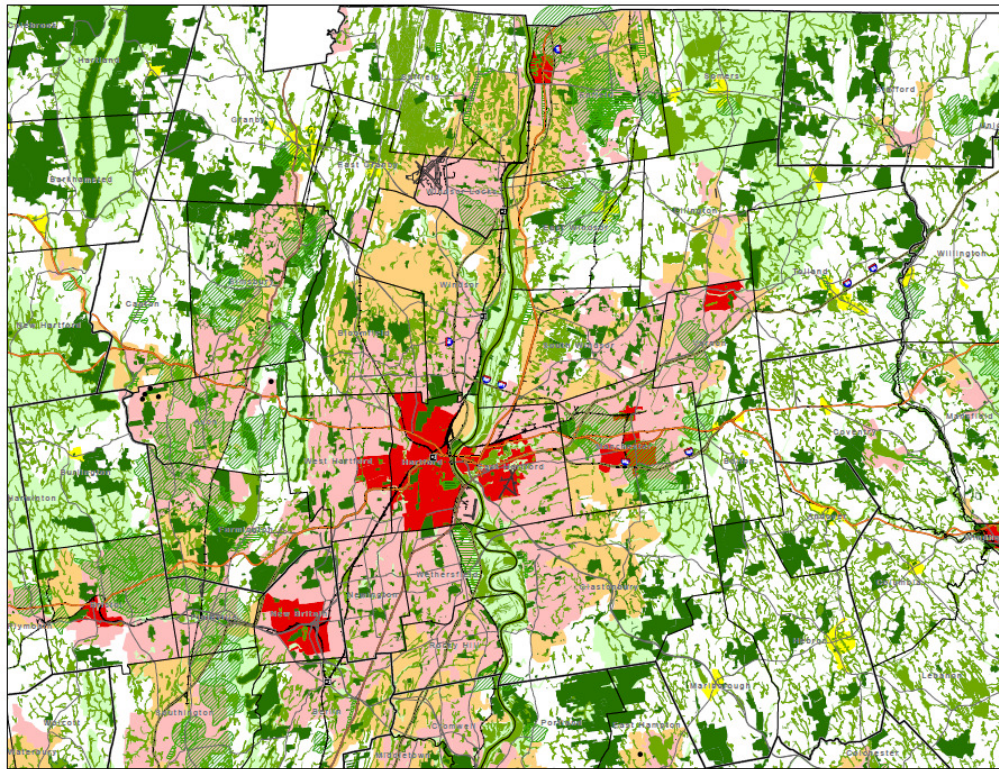


Figure 15 Enfield in the context of the Capital Region. As shown in this image, Enfield is the only regional center in its vicinity.

Findings

- Enfield has the largest population of the towns that immediately surround it. The second largest population is that of the Town of Longmeadow, followed by the Towns of Suffield, East Windsor and Somers.
- Enfield's land use patterns could be affected most likely by conditions and actions in Longmeadow and East Windsor. Longmeadow's relatively large population depends on the employment opportunities found in Enfield mostly because it lacks its own commercial and industrial base. Longmeadow's lack of multi-family housing may also encourage young and elderly households to seek the housing they need in Enfield first. In contrast, the Town of East Windsor has a modest portion of its population that depends on employment opportunities in Enfield. However, East Windsor's most significant influence on Enfield could be continued expansion of the commercial area along Route 5 near the Connecticut River waterfront. Another factor to consider is the existence and potential expansion of East Windsor's Warehouse Point village. Industry that could develop on Enfield's side should not pose negative impacts to the health of area residents.
- Preserving agriculture is important to the residents of the Towns of Enfield, Somers and East Windsor. Ensuring that agricultural land use is continuous across both town lines can greatly help maintain the economic viability of agricultural activities in all three municipalities. Other strategies such as using the State's purchase of development rights program, or enacting local right to farm laws, or creating sewer avoidance areas will be beneficial. Greater effectiveness could be achieved by planning collaboratively.
- Residents of Enfield and the surrounding towns all value the small town, rural character of their communities. While booming population growth does not seem to be a problem for any of them, they all recognize that current development patterns can quickly diminish the very features that make their communities special. All of the towns appear to have aggressive open space preservation programs, which have the double purpose of providing public recreation areas and protecting local water resources. Many communities have also begun to direct new housing development to their traditional downtown areas or village centers. Revitalizing those places, allowing mixed-use and multi-family developments is increasingly becoming a common growth management strategy in the area.